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**Wildlife
on the
Public Lands**

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The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 launched a new era for public land management in America's Third Century. The Act provides that the public lands remain under the stewardship of the Federal Government, unless disposal is in the national interest, and that their resources be managed under a multiple-use concept that will best meet present and future needs of the American people. This information booklet concerns one of these multiple uses: Habitat for wildlife and fish.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

Americans own a tremendous amount of land and water that provides homes for wildlife and fish. Almost one-third of the total land area of the United States is publicly owned through the Federal Government. The bulk of these Federal lands, some 60 percent or an area almost twice as large as Texas, is under the stewardship of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The 470 million acres under BLM administration range from the glaciated peaks of Alaska to the shimmering deserts of Arizona, California and Nevada. In between are millions of acres of rain-swept forests in Oregon and Washington, red and white sandstone canyons in New Mexico and Utah, and vast prairies and soaring mountains in Wyoming, Idaho and Colorado. In addition to these extensive public lands in the West, including Alaska, BLM manages numerous scattered islands and small tracts of land in the eastern and midwestern States. Such varied terrain naturally supports a great variety of wildlife.

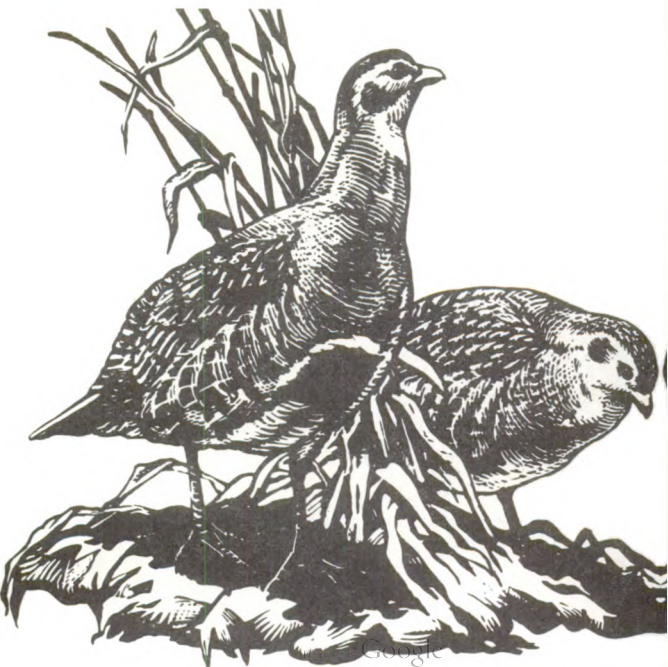
Some 377 million acres of these public lands have been identified as big game habitat, 403 million acres as small game habitat, and 93 million acres as waterfowl habitat. Wetlands include five million surface acres of lakes, 7,644 individual reservoirs, and 270,000 miles of streams. No single Federal or State agency manages more wildlife habitat than the Bureau of Land Management.

Roaming these public lands are some 20 percent, or one out of every five, of the big game animals of the United States, including most of the caribou,

brown and grizzly bears, and desert bighorn sheep; 50 percent of the moose; 65 percent of the mule deer, and 45 percent of the antelope. More than half of the West Coast catch of salmon and steelhead comes from spawning beds within the public lands.

Planning for Wildlife

For many years, BLM's management of the public lands has been based on a multiple-use concept where a variety of uses can and do occur on one unit of land. With passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act in October 1976, this multiple-use principle became a national law. The Act specifies that management of public lands be on the basis of multiple use and sustained yield, and that one of the major uses is fish and wildlife development and utilization. This so-called BLM "Organic Act" also specifies that public lands be managed in a



manner that will provide food and habitat for fish and wildlife. The Act also gives BLM the authority to make regulations for the protection of wildlife habitat and provides BLM with law enforcement authority.

When applying a multiple land use principle, how can an agency reconcile varying demands for one piece of ground when some of these demands may well be in conflict? Do commodity uses take precedence over other uses not normally assigned a dollar value? How can full consideration of wildlife habitat values be assured on lands that also have commercial value for mining, timber harvest, or livestock grazing?

Resolving these often competing demands is no easy task, and BLM relies heavily on the counsel and guidance of local entities when making these land use decisions. Various BLM advisory councils, as well as local and State governments, are consulted, particularly the States' game and fisheries agencies. Private citizens are given an opportunity to study proposed land use plans and make their opinions known through public hearings or written comments. Also helping to guide the agency's wildlife habitat management efforts are scores of BLM fisheries and wildlife scientists, many of whom hold advanced degrees. This staff is supported by numerous foresters, range conservationists, recreation specialists, hydrologists, geologists, archaeologists, wildfire management specialists, and other professionals.

Planning for Wildlife in TIMBER PRODUCTION

Much of the public land in the West, particularly at higher elevations, is important timber-producing land, with the western Oregon forests being among the most productive timberlands in the world. Commercial timber harvest is not only important to the local economy but has nationwide significance for home building and other construction.

Under BLM's planning system, wildlife values on these timber lands are given full consideration. Modified timber-cutting practices can open up certain areas to encourage growth of young plants that provide a basic food source for deer and other browse-eating wildlife. Such cutting practices can also increase the "edge effect," a merging of two different types of plant communities. This in turn provides a greater diversity of habitat for a larger number and variety of wildlife species.

Location and layout of timber sale areas and construction and placement of logging roads also take wildlife into consideration. BLM managers may not allow timber cutting in areas that are crucial to the survival of sensitive, threatened or endangered wildlife. Cutting also may be restricted in areas that provide crucial habitat, such as calving areas, fawning grounds and nesting sites, for other wildlife.

Other actions that may be taken to minimize the impact on wildlife and to maintain environmental quality include:

—Leaving a buffer strip of trees along streams to shade and cool the water and to prevent erosion and siltation that would harm fish habitat;

—Building culverts to permit fish passage wherever roads cross streams;

—Preserving dead trees that provide homes for hole-nesting wildlife.

Planning for Wildlife in

LIVESTOCK GRAZING

Lands administered by BLM are of great importance for livestock grazing. When range studies are conducted to determine livestock grazing capacity for a particular area, forage for wildlife is reserved first. Livestock grazing is managed in a manner that strives to maintain forage for both wildlife and livestock. Using grazing systems, such as "rest-rotation grazing," livestock can be manipulated to graze in a way that encourages growth of valuable wildlife plants, in some cases faster than would be possible if livestock grazing was not permitted. These grazing systems are incorporated into new grazing Allotment Management Plans developed by the Bureau.

BLM also has developed new livestock fencing techniques to improve passage for big game such as deer, elk and pronghorn antelope. More than 500 miles of fences have been modified, opening up some two million acres. Even more acreage will become accessible to big game as old existing fences are modified in key areas throughout the West.

Spring and meadow developments and livestock watering devices are also being installed in such a manner as to provide much needed water for wildlife in arid regions of the West.

Planning for Wildlife in

MINERAL DEVELOPMENT

The public lands contain many of the Nation's richest mineral deposits. Extracting these minerals can adversely affect wildlife and its habitat if proper safeguards are not worked into mineral development plans. The northern Great Plains, for instance, contain enormous amounts of coal, much of it shallow enough to extract by strip mining techniques. Wildlife will be affected when large segments of the surface are disturbed to move this coal to help offset America's energy shortages, but through BLM's multiple use planning, the adverse effects are reduced to a minimum.

In developing land use plans for strip mining of coal, the initial effort is to determine where these coal beds are and how their location relates to crucial wildlife areas. Suppose sage grouse or sharp-tail grouse "dancing grounds" are underlain with coal. It's doubtful that these traditional mating areas would be relocated if disturbed by mining. Or perhaps there is coal underneath crucial antelope winter range. Through the BLM planning system, such areas can be and have been excluded from mineral development.

Once a particular coal bed is mined, reclamation efforts begin. The land is reshaped; stockpiled top soil is redistributed over the mined area; and re-seeding is carried out. Thus, in many cases, wildlife habitat can again be established through seedings; construction of water areas for fish, waterfowl and other wildlife, and other habitat rehabilitation techniques.

Planning for Wildlife in OUTDOOR RECREATION

Recreation is an important use of the public lands. It, too, is addressed in the Bureau's multiple-use planning. Because of the great numbers of game animals found on these lands, hunting is one of the more popular recreational pursuits. Hunting, as controlled by the various States, is one of the most important game management tools since animal populations can be allowed to increase or be reduced to maintain balance with available habitat. Angling is also an important form of recreation because many lakes and streams on public lands provide excellent fishing.

Wildlife interests that center on bird watching, wildlife photography, or other so-called "non-consumptive" uses are other important forms of recreation for many thousands of visitors to the public lands. In fact, some of the most unusual forms of wildlife in North America are found locally on certain areas of public land, and many people travel long distances just to see or photograph particular species.

Recreation involving off-road vehicles is another popular use of public lands. Campers, hunters, fishermen, and other recreationists resort to motorcycles, four-wheel-drive vehicles, snowmobiles and other machines to move about in the usually rough country. To prevent damage to wildlife and wildlife habitat, BLM sets aside specific trails and general locations where these vehicles may be used and, in cases where a crucial wildlife area may be jeopardized, the area is closed to all such vehicular traffic.

Planning for Wildlife in ENGINEERING

On-the-ground habitat improvement projects either follow or proceed hand in hand with BLM's land use planning. The Bureau constructs hundreds of small reservoirs each year. Some of these are designed to control water runoff and subsequent erosion; others are for livestock water. Professional wildlife management biologists are involved in the design to insure that features beneficial to wildlife are incorporated. Canada geese and various duck species prefer to nest in marsh grasses located on small islands. Such islands are easy to build in a reservoir during construction and add little to the total cost.

Through engineering techniques, the reservoir waterline is marked with stakes. Shallow areas and peninsulas jutting into the pond then become obvious. When construction begins, earth is scooped from the reservoir bottom to build the dam, and some of this material is easily deposited in shallow areas to create islands. More island material can be scooped from the "necks" of small peninsulas leaving the tip to form yet another island. Such modifications have significantly increased the numbers of nesting waterfowl in eastern Montana and in other areas.

Properly managed grazing around such reservoirs also encourages various shoreline plants that provide ideal nesting cover for ducks and other water birds.

In addition to the benefits to waterfowl and other forms of birds and animal life, considerable fish habitat now exists where previously there was none. Excellent fishing has resulted in many cases.



Planning for Wildlife in

RIGHTS-OF-WAY APPROVALS

Private companies and organizations frequently apply for rights-of-way across public lands for electric transmission lines, pipelines, roads, irrigation ditches and other uses. Before such applications are approved, careful consideration is given to their potential effects on various resources, including wildlife. For example, electric transmission line towers can become preferred perching sites for eagles and hawks. In the past, many of these birds were electrocuted when their wings touched two wires at the same time. The Bureau has developed specific criteria for transmission lines constructed across public lands that require adequate spacing of the wires to prevent these accidents. Depending on the type of transmission line proposed, these regulations might require an extended perch well above the wires on each pole or tower, or other proper safeguards.

Construction of pipelines or other transportation systems requiring rights-of-way can create considerable surface disturbance. Careful land use planning assures that these rights-of-way do not go through crucial wildlife habitat or adversely affect habitat of endangered wildlife species.

Wildlife as Primary Use

Although the Bureau plans for multiple use of areas under its jurisdiction, few areas will support full development of each and every resource found there. One resource use will sometimes be given primary consideration in a particular planning unit or area. Wildlife habitat management is that primary use in a number of cases.

In southern Idaho, along 33 miles of the rugged Snake River canyon, the Bureau has established the Snake River Birds of Prey Natural Area to protect nesting habitat for eagles, hawks, falcons, owls, ospreys, and vultures. This 31,000-acre area contains many rocky ledges and pinnacles that annually attract more nesting raptors than any other known location of similar size in North America. Here, the primary use is definitely wildlife.

Other examples of public lands where the primary use is wildlife include the 5,300-acre Blanca Waterfowl Area in Colorado, the 1,000-acre San Simon Cienega Mexican Duck Area in New Mexico and Arizona that provides needed habitat for the rare Mexican Duck, the 3,640-acre Desert Pupfish Area in Nevada where a small, rare and unique species of fish lives in warm water springs, and the 24,500-acre Highland Range Desert Bighorn Sheep Area in southern Nevada. In addition to such specific wildlife areas, BLM administers 42 designated natural areas and 11 primitive areas that provide undisturbed habitat for many wildlife species.

A State-Federal Partnership

BLM works closely with State wildlife agencies in wildlife activities on the public lands. BLM's wildlife responsibilities relate to the habitat while the State's responsibilities relate to the species. These relationships have long been formalized in written agreements. Close and productive cooperative programs and working relationships are under way as a result.

A breakthrough for expanding BLM-State relationships occurred in late 1974 with the passage of a Federal law to promote wildlife management on the public lands. Known as the Sikes Act, this legislation calls for close cooperation with State wildlife agencies to "plan, develop, maintain, and coordinate programs for the conservation and rehabilitation of wildlife, fish, and game." Cooperative agreements to implement this law are now in effect between BLM and all of the western States and a few eastern States. Significant acreages of public lands are covered by the agreements.

To get this expanded cooperative habitat management effort under way on the public lands, BLM, in cooperation with State wildlife agencies, recently initiated a variety of projects. These include: rehabilitation of crucial mule deer winter ranges in Oregon, Nevada and Utah; protection of streams for endangered cutthroat trout in Nevada and Utah; reintroduction of bighorn sheep to certain ranges in New Mexico and Wyoming; protection of more than 30,000 acres of habitat important to the desert tortoise in California, and a comprehensive wildlife habitat management program for the million-acre Piceance Basin area of Colorado.

A significant portion of BLM's wildlife program funds have, in fact, been directed to implementation of these and other cooperative projects. This is only a start, for it is BLM's intent that many other habitat management programs will be implemented in the future in partnership with State wildlife agencies.

The Road Ahead

The long-range outlook for fish and wildlife resources dependent on the public lands is improving. The continuing process of sound land use planning that includes enhancement and protection of wildlife habitat—combined with close working relationships with State wildlife agencies and other organizations and groups where BLM-administered lands are located—offers great promise for the future of wildlife on the public lands.

How You Can Help:

You can be an important part of this national effort to improve habitat and living conditions for wildlife on the public lands. Here's how:

- Participate in public meetings regarding land use planning when they are held in your area.

- Participate in and keep abreast of activities of organizations that encourage wise use of both harvestable and non-harvestable resources, including wildlife, on public lands.

- If there is a Bureau of Land Management office in your area, get to know its Manager. Ask him what you can do locally to improve conditions for wildlife.

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